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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001647

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SUBJECT: COMMENTS FROM U.S. ELECTION OBSERVERS

REF: MANILA 1544 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) 83 volunteers - including Locally Engaged Staff and American officers, specialists, and spouses, as well as the Ambassador and DCM - from throughout the U.S. Mission in Manila took part as officially accredited observers to the Philippine mid-term elections on May 14 (reftels). Their presence in 24 key sites throughout the country as well as around Metro Manila strongly demonstrated U.S. support for Philippine democratic processes and our shared hope with the Philippine people for the most free and fair elections possible. This report encapsulates some key observations from our team members.

"U.S. Embassy - Wow!"

¶2. (U) One common theme that the observers reported was the warmth of the welcome by voters, election workers, and volunteers alike. Some comments from the field:
-- "met by people with enthusiasm," Caloocan City;
-- "warm welcome from Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) staff, other watchers, and the voters," Legazpi City, Albay province;
-- "first foreign observers in her memory," Laoag City, Ilocos Norte province;
-- "voters and voting officials were cordial and receptive to our presence...Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCVR) and Philippine National Police (PNP) extremely helpful," Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental province;
-- "Everywhere...people were very happy to see the U.S. Embassy present...they acted reassured that we were present," Cebu province;

-- "the atmosphere was very peaceful and friendly...COMELEC officials acted very professionally and were welcoming," Isabela province;
-- "thrilled with our observation of the election...delighted to see us," Bohol province;
-- COMELEC, PNP and NAMFREL "contacts were helpful and accommodating," Cebu province;
-- "excellent, professional support" from the police, Bukidnon province;
-- "welcomed observers to increase transparency and 'prove we are just doing our job,'" Cebu province;
-- "thank you for caring about our elections," Mandalulong City;
-- "U.S. Embassy - Wow!" from Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province.

Common problems

¶3. (U) While the most common theme from the field was "peaceful and orderly," various problems surfaced repeatedly in different sites (septel will analyze more serious allegations of cheating):
-- "campaign materials strewn not only outside polling centers but even inside... overcrowding...vote buying (20 pesos or US \$0.50)," Dagupan City, Pangasinan province;
-- hand-held "fans (with campaign advertisements on them)

distributed to overheated

electoral workers inside polling centers," Tarlac province;
-- "inability to locate their names on precinct voting lists,"
Tarlac province;
-- "a government agency paid 1,000 pesos (US\$ 20) per employee to
vote for a particular party list group," Tacloban City, Leyte
Province;
-- "members of the BEI were all exhausted and the margin of errors
in marking the election returns was really high," Caloocan City;
-- "COMELEC...failed to provide ink pads...these had to be sourced
locally," Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- "a lost key and missing lock in one ballot box incident,"
Bacolod, Negro Occidental province;
-- "some campaigning too close to the polling site," Iloilo
province;
-- "errors we did observe most probably were errors of
inefficiency," General Santos City;
-- "while we saw no irregularities, there was certainly variation in
the process among the precincts, e.g. some voters had their fingers
inked before voting while other after voting," Davao City, Davao del
Sur;
-- "different procedures for finger inking," Quezon City;
-- "moments of confusion, congestion, and the non-observance/law
enforcement of proper election procedures...fatigue," Roxas City,
Capiz province;
-- "poor people depend on the goodwill of the politicians, that is
the only point of hope; many voters received from 250 pesos to 500
pesos (US\$5-10). For them, it is worth the effort to vote," Palawan
province;
-- "precincts had different procedures for what happened before and
after vote...inconsistent recording," Makati City;
-- "people not on the voter registration lists even though they had
voter ID cards," Quezon City;
-- "desperate nature of many poor residents who are willing to

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accept between 50 and 300 pesos (US\$1-6) for their vote," Surigao
City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- "voter lists were not alphabetized...'I've grown old coming to
this school to vote!'" Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- "several dozens of disenfranchised voters," Metro Manila;
-- "'they took my name off the registration list because they knew
how I would vote!'" Pasay City;
-- "nobody actually watching if the BEI was actually calling out
the right names" during counting, Metro Manila;
-- "difficulty finding their precincts...long lines...illegal
distribution of sample ballots within polling centers...voters'
fatigue...long voting hours," Angeles City, Pampanga province;
-- "minor irregularities during voting...long lines at precincts,"
Laoag City, Ilocos Norte province;
-- "voters not asked for any kind of identification before being
permitted to vote, precincts," Davao City, Davao del Sur;
-- "fans embossed with names and/or slogans of politicians," Laoag
City, Ilocos Norte province;
-- "some voters were not able to vote due to their names not
listed," Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental province;
-- "dead relative was still listed on the voting roll," Bukidnon
province;
-- "deceased voters were still on the register," Isabela province;

-- "no consistency in guidance provided by the COMELEC," Bukidnon
province;
-- "lights suddenly went out" city-wide during canvassing, Laoag
City, Ilocos Norte province;
-- "counting was extremely slow...the BEI staff was really
exhausted...canvassing started very late and very slow," Bohol
province;
-- "confusion over voter registration lists...long waits," Bohol
province;
-- "'I feel like am a guardian for a failed process,'" Dagupan
City, Pangasinan province.

Philippine resolve

14. (U) Many, probably most, of our observers returned to Manila with increased or renewed respect for the determination of ordinary Philippine citizens not only to participate in their electoral process but to work to make it better. Some illuminating quotes from the voters in the field along with comments from our observers:

-- "'we hope for a peaceful process,'" Malolos City, Bulacan province;
-- "'the problem is with Congress passing election laws that are not easy to comply with. Congress needs to give the COMELEC blanket authorization to study the electoral process and submit its recommendations to Congress,'" Tacloban City, Leyte Province;
-- "'it's not enough to vote a leader; what's more important is to vote for the right leader,'" Caloocan City;
-- "the spirit of volunteerism was strong," Bohol province;
-- "the feel of a community coming together to accomplish something important," Legazpi City, Albay province;
-- "'Voting is my right,'" Quezon City;
-- "'more representation of younger people in the voter turnout...higher number of teenagers among the volunteers...more active civil society outreach program,'" Bukidnon province;
-- "first-time voters...were excited to be participating," Bohol province;
-- "exuberance around the station but seriousness reflecting the gravity of the process," Bohol province;
-- "'This is my first time to volunteer...I wanted to see everything for myself,'" Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- "voters were quiet, patient, eager, and disciplined. . .seem to realize what is at stake," Isabela province;
-- "'Our job is very important, especially during the counting,'" Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- "election workers...took their responsibility very seriously," Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province;
-- public school teachers acting as election workers were "unsung/unknown heroes in Philippine democracy," Cebu province;
-- "elderly people struggling to go up the stairs just to vote and struggle even more to write down 30 names," Cebu province;
-- "everyone...determined to prove their good reputation this time," Cebu province;
-- "'BE HONEST' signs at every polling center," Bacolod, Negros Occidental province;
-- "marked general enthusiasm by voters and concerned citizens," Angeles City, Pampanga province;
-- "one volunteer noted 'if you don't participate in the process, you can't complain about government,'" Cebu province;
-- "'I vote because there is hope,'" Cebu province.

KENNEY